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CARTER'S INTELLIGENCE CHIEF SIZES UP WORLD'S TROUBLE SPOTS

Interview With Adm. Stansfield Turner, Director, Central Intelligence Agency

On the eve of President Carter's departure on his first overseas mission—a summit conference with Allied leaders in London—Admiral Turner took the editors of *U.S. News & World Report* on a verbal tour of danger areas around the globe.

Before joining CIA in February, Stansfield Turner, 53, had a long Navy career that included the presidency of the Naval War College and command of Allied forces in Southern Europe. He attended the Naval Academy with President Carter, and later was a Rhodes Scholar.

Q Admiral Turner, do you agree with the view expressed by some high officials in recent years that the Soviet Union is an ascending power and the U.S. is declining?

A The Soviets have their strengths, and they have their weaknesses. Their weaknesses are in economics and politics. I don't see the Soviet economy climbing to outdistance us. Our lead is so great that they cannot hope to overtake us unless our percentage of growth every year were to be a lot smaller than theirs. And that is not happening. So, in terms of raw economic power, we are not a declining power.

As for ideology, the Russians may think it is a strength for them, but I am sure we would all agree that their ideology is hamstringing them in many ways. After all, what's left of pure Marxism? Where is it practiced or believed in? You have a different brand of Communism in every country in Europe—and a different brand in Yugoslavia, a different brand in China. Even in the Soviet Union, they don't hold to it very carefully. So—no, I don't think the Soviets are on the ascendancy ideologically.

Q And militarily?

A They have a strong military position. One of the reasons they are putting such emphasis on their military strength is that they are trying to convert military power into political advantage. They have no other strengths that they can exploit in Africa and elsewhere. Military is all that they have.

Q Is the U.S. falling behind Russia in military power?

A In my view, we still have the edge in the strategic nuclear field as a result of our preponderance of warheads and the accuracy of our missiles. However, the trends are moving in the other direction because of the substantial effort the Soviets are putting into strategic weapons. If that continues, they could close the warhead gap and outdistance us in what is known as throw weight.

The complex equation as to when those trends might give the Soviets a militarily superior position is very difficult to state—given the fact that you're balancing numbers of warheads, accuracies and throw weight in the same mix.

Q Are the Soviets near the point where they could knock out our land-based missile force with a first-strike attack, as some strategists claim?

A I don't see a first strike as being anything like a rational calculation in the years immediately ahead by either side. What concerns me is the image that is created and the impact this could have on world opinion if there is a perceived imbalance in favor of the Soviets in strategic nuclear power.

So I think that, first, we must understand the nuclear strategic equation as best we can. And, second, the United States must not let it get out of balance in fact or in perception. I don't think that the people of this country are going to let the Soviets outdistance us in a dangerous way. But we've got to be vigilant as to that.

Q We've heard a great deal lately about Russia's massive civil-defense program. Is there any danger that this will give them a decisive strategic advantage over us?

A Certainly not at the present time. I don't believe that the Soviets are near the point in civil defense where they could think that they could absorb a nuclear blow from us with reasonable loss—that is, a loss they would be willing to accept.

It doesn't seem to me that the damage to the three ingredients that civil defense protects—leadership, population and productive capacity—could be estimated by the Soviets to be small enough to make it an acceptable risk for them to initiate a nuclear war with deliberateness.

Q What truth is there to the report that the Russians have made a breakthrough in developing a beam that could destroy all of our missiles?

A The question of Soviet development of a charged-particle-beam weapon has been the subject of intensive analysis for a number of years. All the results of these studies have been made available to high-level U.S. Government officials on a continuing basis. The Central Intelligence Agency does not believe the Soviet Union has achieved a breakthrough which could lead to a charged-particle-beam weapon capable of neutralizing ballistic missiles. This question is obviously of concern to the U.S. Government, and is continually under review by all members of the intelligence community.

Q Aside from the idea of a first strike, are the Soviets thinking and planning in terms of actually fighting a nuclear war rather than just deterring one?

A The difference that I note between them and us is this: The Soviets in their planning start with cold war and think the process through all the way to a strategic nuclear war—and even to postwar recovery. We, on the other hand, tend to think from cold war to deterrence. There's less emphasis in our thinking on what happens after the nuclear weapons start going off, because the idea is so abhorrent.

It's a different psychological attitude. Maybe it comes from the fact that the Russians are from a country that's been attacked and overrun a number of times in their memory. So they have more of an inclination to think through the implications of someone attacking them.

Q Are they more inclined to contemplate resorting to nuclear war to achieve their political objectives?

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A I think not. I think they have shown a rational, sensible approach to the nuclear-weapons problem—a willingness, for example, to negotiate SALT-type agreements.

Q. In your opinion, where do the Soviets pose the greatest threat to the United States today?

A Well, you have to break that down between where our greatest interest is and where their greatest opportunity is. We have a vital national interest in Western Europe—in maintaining the NATO fabric whole and strong. The Soviet Union is trying hard to build up enough military power in Europe to give the impression that they can dominate that area. With an intimidating force on their side, they want to fracture the NATO Alliance from within by undermining the resolve of the NATO Allies. That is a serious threat—but not the most urgent.

The Soviets are pressing hardest at the moment in Africa. So, in that sense, Africa is the most urgent threat. But clearly Africa is not as vital a national interest to us as is Europe.

Q. What is the Soviet objective in Africa?

A I think that, all over the world, the basically imperialistic thrust of the Soviet Union is one of opportunism. They are very adroit in the sense of pushing their opportunities wherever they develop, but not pushing them to the point where it involves a major commitment of Soviet resources or prestige if they fail.

They've found that NATO has stymied their imperialistic expansionism in Western Europe. And so they're probing each opportunity that comes up anywhere to get a foothold or friendship.

Somalia is an example of how this works. The Soviets start with a fishing fleet calling in at a Somali port. Then they offer aid to the Somali Army. The Army stages a coup, and a general takes over as President of the country. Then the Soviets build the fishing port into a naval base—and on and on in gradual steps.

They look constantly for an opportunity for that first step—a fishing agreement or a trade agreement—and then they just keep pushing, but without committing themselves in a major way.

Q. How successful has the Soviet Union been with this strategy?

A Only moderately successful. They've established three toe holds that seem to be useful to them in Africa. They've had a toe hold in Guinea for six years or so, and seem to be hanging on there. They've had one for a short time in Angola, and they're doing all right there. There's no major Soviet presence, but the Angolans are still co-operating with them. And the Soviets have had a fairly strong position in Somalia for seven or eight years, and it seems to be holding.

They're beginning to explore other opportunities—for example, in Southern and Eastern Africa with the visit of President Podgorny.

On the other hand, the Russians have failed in Egypt. They've lost a major position there. Outside Africa, they failed some years ago in Indonesia. Their relations with Syria are not as warm as they were several years ago. So they are not always adroit enough to do this well. Basically they lack the economic foundation to be an imperialistic power.

Q. What about Ethiopia? Are the Russians establishing another toe hold in Africa at the expense of the United States?

A There is no doubt that Soviet ties with Ethiopia's present leftist regime are close. At the same time, however, the apparent Soviet gains in Ethiopia may lead to a deterioration in its formerly close relations with Somalia.

Q. Are the Russians using Cubans in black Africa as a Soviet tool, or are the Cubans there for their own ends?

A I think it's a fine line. The Cubans are anxious to establish themselves as a leader in the "third world." The 1979 conference of nonaligned nations will be held in Havana. Thus the Cubans are anxious to raise their world image in Africa and elsewhere in the third world. However, I don't think that they could afford economically to indulge in these activities without considerable support from the Soviet Union. The Russians, by operating with a surrogate, get an opportunity to establish an African foothold without necessarily committing themselves too much.

Q. Admiral Turner, why are we so worried about the Indian Ocean, considering the relative weakness of Soviet naval strength there?

A I wouldn't say their naval strength is relatively weak there. At the same time, I wouldn't say that the Soviet naval presence is formidable compared with ours, which is somewhat smaller. The difference is not overwhelming.

The asymmetry that impresses me is that the United States as well as Western Europe and Japan have a vital interest in the Indian Ocean—in the oil route which is vital to our future prosperity and security—while the Soviet Union does not have a vital interest there.

Q. In that case, why do the Russians maintain a naval force there?

A I think their presence in the Indian Ocean is symptomatic of their desire to leapfrog out to gain influence in other areas of the world while they're stalemated in Europe.

Now, you can talk about their continuing naval presence in the Mediterranean as a counter to the U.S. position in the Mediterranean. You can talk about their continuing naval presence in the Norwegian Sea and the Sea of Japan as legitimate defensive concerns close to their homeland. But you can only look at a continuing Soviet presence off West Africa and in the Indian Ocean as gunboat diplomacy. I don't say that this is malicious or bad, but I am saying it's indicative

Global Dangers Facing U.S.—Admiral Turner's Assessment

Soviets in Africa: This is the "most urgent threat" posed by Russia, but the Soviets have been "only moderately successful" there.

Western Europe: Russia is "stalemated in Europe" and therefore is trying "to leapfrog out to gain influence in other areas of the world."

Post-Tito Yugoslavia: "The most fragile point in the European scene today," where Soviets will "look for an opportunity and probe without getting themselves overcommitted."

Revolt in Eastern Europe: Even though there is a "stirring of thought behind the Iron Curtain . . . I don't see a real possibility of a major fracturing of the Soviet bloc."

Indian Ocean: Russia has no vital interest there. The only purpose of her naval presence there is "gunboat diplomacy."

U.S.-Soviet balance: Russians emphasize military power because "they have no other strengths that they can exploit." The Soviets lag in economic power and ideological appeal.

First-strike threat: Neither superpower can rationally contemplate first-strike nuclear attack "in the years immediately ahead."

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of a change in strategy, dictated by the fact that they are blocked on land.

Q. Do you see any danger that the Russians will be able to break the stalemate in Europe to their advantage?

A No, at this point I don't, although I recognize that some of our allies are facing difficult political and economic problems today.

"INTERNAL PROBLEMS FOR SOVIETS"—

Q. What about the situation in Eastern Europe? How dangerous is it for the Soviets?

A It varies from country to country. Since Helsinki, there has been a stirring of thought behind the Iron Curtain. Yet, basically, one has the feeling that the dictatorial controls in those countries will be exercised ruthlessly as requirements dictate. There could be internal problems for the Soviets—as there have been in Hungary and Poland and Czechoslovakia. But I don't see a real possibility of a major fracturing of the Soviet bloc.

Q. Do you expect the Soviets to make a grab for Yugoslavia after Tito's death?

A I think that Yugoslavia is the most fragile point in the European scene today. I would think that the Soviets would look for an opportunity and probe without getting themselves overcommitted.

Q. Do you anticipate a Russian military move to force Yugoslavia back into the Soviet bloc?

A That would be a very definite commitment by the Soviets, and it would be taken only as a last resort. They would try a lot of other things first before they contemplated that.

Q. Turning to Russia's other flank—in the Far East: Are the Soviets and Chinese likely to patch up their quarrel in the near future?

A That is always a possibility when you are dealing with countries that operate on such an expedient basis as the Soviets did in their relations with Nazi Germany before World War II. But I don't see it on the immediate horizon. Even if it happened, I doubt if it would be anything more than an expedient. The fissure between these two countries is quite deep.

Q. President Carter proposes to withdraw U.S. ground forces from South Korea. Will that affect China's relations with Russia or its attitude toward this country?

A Of course, it would have an effect on Chinese attitudes if that decision were made and executed. How important it would be will be largely dependent on how and when a withdrawal takes place—if it does—and what changes occur on the world scene in the interim. It's pretty difficult to speculate in the abstract until some policy decision is made here as to how and when it's going to take place—if it does.

Q. Will such a withdrawal be seen as an American retreat from Asia by Japan and other U.S. allies?

A Again, it depends on how it's done and whether the preparatory steps can persuade those countries that it's not a retreat from Asia. Those who are looking to us for a security function out there would be bound to think of it as something of a retreat. But the *status quo* is not always the right answer. Any time you change something, it's going to be approved by some and disapproved by others.

Q. One further point about the Soviet Union: What is your reading of Brezhnev's health? Is he about finished, as recent reports suggest?

A My reading of Brezhnev's health is that it's a sine curve that goes up and down. Sometimes he wears himself out a bit or he has a particular problem, but I don't see this as a curve that's constantly declining and has a terminal date that can be anticipated. It's not such that we have to sit here and plan, "Well, in 12 months or 24 months we're bound to have somebody new."

Q. Are there any signs of a power struggle for the succession in the Kremlin?

A No, I don't read the signs that way at this point.

Q. Would a leadership change have any significant effect on Soviet-American relations?

A Yes, it's bound to. With a new Administration here in Washington beginning to establish an understanding with the Brezhnev Administration in Moscow, we would have to start over and feel out a new Administration over there. There would bound to be some slowdown in the development of enough understanding to proceed with things like SALT.

Q. Turning to your own situation at the CIA, Admiral, are you handicapped in countering Soviet and Cuban activities in Africa by restrictions on covert operations?

A No, I've not found them a handicap at this point. There are no new limitations on our covert operations other than specific prohibitions on assassinations. I would not permit that kind of activity anyway. The point now is that there must be presidential approval before any covert action is undertaken, and Congress must be informed in a timely manner.

"WE CAN'T ABANDON COVERT ACTION"—

Q. Are covert operations—dirty tricks of that sort—really necessary?

A We can't abandon covert action. However, in today's atmosphere, there is less likelihood that we would want to use this capability for covert action. But I can envisage circumstances in which the country might demand some covert action.

Q. What circumstances?

A For instance, let's say a terrorist group appears with a nuclear weapon and threatens one of our cities and says, "If you don't give us some money or release some prisoners or do something, we will blow up Washington, D.C."

I think the country would be incensed if we did not have a covert-action capability to try to counter that—to go in and get the weapon or defuse it.

So, although we don't exercise it today, I think we must retain some capability for covert actions that range from small paramilitary operations to other actions that will influence events.

Q. There have been recent allegations that you have declassified reports on energy to support the President's policy decisions. Does this represent a new CIA policy of using intelligence to support White House programs?

A That is definitely not the case. This study was started over a year ago—before even the election. The President did not know of it until a few days before he mentioned it in a press conference.

Let me say, though, that I believe that the intelligence community should make more information available to the public on an unclassified basis. The public is paying for our work and deserves to benefit from it within the necessary limits of secrecy. Moreover, a well-informed public is the greatest strength of our nation.

I also believe that declassifying as much information as possible is a good way to provide better protection for those secrets we must hold. Excessive classification simply breeds disrespect for and abuse of all classified data. I intend to continue to declassify and publish information of value and interest to our people.

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